



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

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<i>Webmaster, Larry Sobczak</i>	
<i>ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase</i>	

2016 MEETINGS

16 January – REO Town Depot (former Grand Trunk Depot), Lansing
February – Cancelled
12 March – Howell Public Library
16 April – New Buffalo Library
21 May – Jackson District Library
11 June – Dearborn Amtrak Station
9 July – Executive Committee
17,18 August – Marquette, 4th Annual MI Rail Conference
24 September –Annual Meeting at Durand Union Station
8 October – Dowagiac City Hall
12 November – Lapeer Amtrak Station
3 December – Executive Committee

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Season's Greetings



The Four Flags Garden Club will host the 25th Annual **Hometown Christmas Celebration** at the Historic Amtrak Depot in Niles on December 3, from 4:30 – 6:00 pm. The depot will be festooned inside and out with fresh greens, window topiaries, wreaths and handmade ornaments on a Fraser Fir Christmas tree donated by Pinecrest Christmas Tree Farm. Musical entertainment will be provided by the *Brandywine Treblaires* and Santa and Mrs. Claus will drop by with cookies, cider and candy.

Dowagiac, too, welcomes visitors throughout the winter months with lights on the depot, thanks to the efforts of MARP member Ron Leatz. Dowagiac's lights glow from November 9 through March 9, brightening the way throughout the winter for Michigan train passengers.

*There will be no December member meeting.
All of us on the MARP Executive Committee
wish you and yours a safe and joyous
holiday season.*

MARP Visits Lapeer and Learns About Passenger Trains of an Earlier Era

The **handsome little train station** in Lapeer, serving train passengers since 1900, was the venue for MARP's membership meeting on November 12. We were joined by several train enthusiasts from the area and are most appreciative of their helpfulness in setting up the room for the interesting presentation given by T.J. Gaffney.

T.J. Gaffney — owner of Streamline Historic Services and a consultant and contract historian to the museum and preservation fields — led us on some interesting journeys of memory around the eastern Thumb area.

The *Pere Marquette*, *Grand Trunk Western* and *Michigan Central* railroads all had passenger operations in the area. Sadly, the quite grand station that once served trains in Port Huron was lost to fire. We saw a photo of another dramatic fire — the 1913 fire that destroyed the massive GTW shops at Port Huron that had employed as many as 1500 people. Most interesting was Gaffney's account of the need for electrification of trains passing through the tunnel and the process of switching back to steam power after emerging from the tunnel.

Gaffney has an extensive background in the history of railroading in this region. His most recent book is *Rails Around the Thumb*, part of Arcadia Publishing's *Images of Rail* series.

Hugh Gurney reported on the most recent of MARP's periodic meetings with *Indian Trails, Inc.* Participating in the meeting were *Indian Trails*' President Chad Cushman, Interline Director Brenda Cheney, retiring Operations Director Ken Henry and his successor Jeff Hutchison, along with MARP representatives Steve Vagnozzi, Jim Wallington, John Langdon, and Hugh Gurney.

Indian Trails continues to work to implement Amtrak Thruway connections that MARP has urged: (1) Mt. Pleasant-East Lansing to connect with the *Blue Water*; and (2) Gaylord-Lansing-Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo to connect with *Wolverine* trains #355 and #350.

(MEETING continues in next column)



HOLIDAY DINNERS AT DURAND UNION STATION

Phone 989-288-3561 for Reservations

The Depot is hosting Holiday Dinners at 6-9 PM on Saturday, December 3rd and Friday, December 9th. Enjoy the display of 50 illuminated Christmas Trees while dining with friends and family in this beautiful historic depot. Tickets are \$20.00 per person, \$18.00 for DUSI members, \$14.00 per child under 10, and \$145 for a table of eight.

Other Holiday events include a Wine Tasting on Saturday, December 10, 6-9 PM

Late Night Tree Viewings 6-9 PM every Tuesday and Thursday in December

The Station and Museum will be Open Christmas Day, 3-7 PM

FOR DETAILS VISIT durandstation.org/events

(MEETING continued from previous column)

[We have learned since the meeting, that Cheney has laid out a schedule to connect US-127 corridor communities to trains #355 and #350 at Kalamazoo. Jim Wallington has forwarded this proposal to Adam Krom at Amtrak who has responded that he will get back to Cheney to move the project forward.]

In addition, Gurney suggested that the US-127 corridor route could provide a connection in East Lansing with the Thruway bus to Toledo where passengers can catch the *Lakeshore Limited* and *Capitol Limited* trains to the East Coast. Indian Trails expressed great interest in another suggestion: *Michigan Flyer* motor coach service between Livingston County and Detroit Metro Airport.

In response to an idea suggested by new MARP member Yuri Popov — i.e., bus service from Amtrak stations in SE Michigan taking passengers across the border at Detroit to connect with VIA in Windsor — *Indian Trails* suggested talking with *Greyhound* because that carrier currently travels into Ontario from Michigan.

Of concern to both *Indian Trails* and MARP are ticketing issues arising from Amtrak's current lack of real-time notification to *Indian Trails* of Thruway tickets sold. This can result in buses being oversold and the possibility that Thruway passengers miss their train connection. A solution to this problem appears to be relatively easy to achieve.

Cushman expressed optimism that *Indian Trails*' relations with Detroit Metro Airport will improve under Interim CEO Joseph Nardone.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS !

MARP's first meeting of 2017 will be held on Saturday, January 14, beginning at 10 AM, at the **REO Town Depot** in Lansing. It has become somewhat of a tradition for us to kick off the new year each January at this beautifully restored former Grand Trunk Western station.

Make Plans Now to Attend



Bagels or Buses? How Michigan Flyer Got Its Start

Reprinted from *Michigan Flyer e-news*, November 2016

In the early 2000s, the airlines decided to do away with commissions for travel agencies like the one Ody and Rachel Norkin operated. That got the couple thinking about another line of work.

"One option was a bagel shop," jokes Ody, the VP of Michigan Flyer. "But the better option was a shuttle service from the Lansing region to Detroit Metro Airport. There were 1,200 private vehicles a day traveling from our region to DTW, so buses made sense."

Research led him to Owosso-based Indian Trails, Inc., Michigan's first and largest bus transportation company. A meeting with its president, Gordon Mackay, soon blossomed into a business partnership.

"It was a very good match," recalls Ody. "We were experienced in making travel arrangements. They knew all about buses, planning and scheduling routes, and operating the best equipment." They called the new company "Michigan Flyer," although at the time "it seemed like an ambitious name for a fledgling start-up."

With four state-of-the-art motorcoaches and eight scheduled runs from mid-Michigan to Detroit's airport and back, Michigan Flyer was launched 10 years ago this week. It carried a total of 34 passengers on the first day.

Now, thanks in part to the public-private "AirRide" partnership with the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority begun in 2012, Michigan Flyer transports 550 to 600 passengers a day on a dozen trips between East Lansing, Ann Arbor and DTW.

While the Flyer has encountered epic obstacles in the course of its odyssey, the Norkins say they'd do it all over again.

"Many customers have told us how Michigan Flyer enabled them to take a trip that otherwise would not have been possible," says Rachel. "For some it was the vacation of a lifetime. For others it was being able to visit a close relative for one last time. Their gratitude really puts the challenges we've faced into perspective."

To receive *Michigan Flyer e-news* [subscribe here](#).



Michigan Flyer founders Rachel and Ody Norkin along with veteran manager Dianne Moore.

Talgo Returns to Wisconsin

Our colleagues at All Aboard Wisconsin invited business and community leaders to celebrate the return of Talgo to Milwaukee with a special reception aboard the private railcar *Caritas* on November 22 on the recently completed new concourse at the Milwaukee Intermodal Station.

Talgo has received a contract from Los Angeles Metro to rebuild and rehabilitate at least 74 heavy rail (subway) cars over the next 56 months. Talgo will re-open its **former manufacturing facility** in Milwaukee's Century City Business Park to perform the work, bringing-back skilled technical jobs and business for local suppliers.

The beautiful rail business car *Caritas* was built by Pullman in 1948 and rebuilt in its present form in 1983 in Milwaukee. Some of you will remember seeing the *Caritas* as part of the consist when the Southern Pacific Daylight 4449 steam locomotive came to the Steam Railroading Institute in Owosso in 2009.



RTA Vote Disappoints

Supporters of the SE Regional Transit Plan remain committed to improving and coordinating transportation options in the region, despite a razor-thin loss at the polls. In the vote for a 1.2 mill tax to support implementation of the plan, Washtenaw and Wayne counties voted 56 % and 53 % in favor, respectively. Oakland County voters were split 50-50, but Macomb County's rejection left the proposal with 18,185 more votes against the proposal than in support.

Transit Riders United (TRU) would like your help in planning next steps. Please take [TRU's survey on regional transit](#).

Meanwhile, voters in Eaton County approved the renewal of a 0.25-mill property tax that raises \$850,000 yearly for public transit.

Nearly 70% of the transit issues on the November ballot were given thumbs up by localities across the nation. Implementation of these projects represents an investment of \$200 billion in increased mobility for people of all ages, income levels, and physical abilities.

View from elsewhere . . .

*"We are dedicated to enhancing our customers' onboard experience, highlighting the unique elements that Amtrak offers . . . **The National** does just that — celebrating the country our customers see gliding past their train window and showcasing the personalities, culture and destinations along America's Railroad®."* —Rob Friedman, Amtrak's Vice President of Brand Management and Marketing.

Amtrak has introduced its first on-board magazine. It is called ***The National*** and you will find it in your seat-back as you ride the trains as well as having **access to the digital edition** on your laptop or mobile phone.

Among the many beautifully written and illustrated articles in the inaugural issue is a **profile of Dan Gilbert**, the founder of Quicken Loans, and one of the prime movers in Detroit's downtown renaissance. (It's no accident that the eagerly anticipated Woodward Avenue streetcar is named the QLine!)

Anyone who has ever ridden the *Empire Builder* across the country will relish **Daniel Shea's photo essay**. A **story by Anne Patchett** evokes the Mississippi that John Robert Smith hinted of in his keynote address for MARP's annual meeting in September. And many will enjoy the **conversation with Gloria Steinem**. Dive in!



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